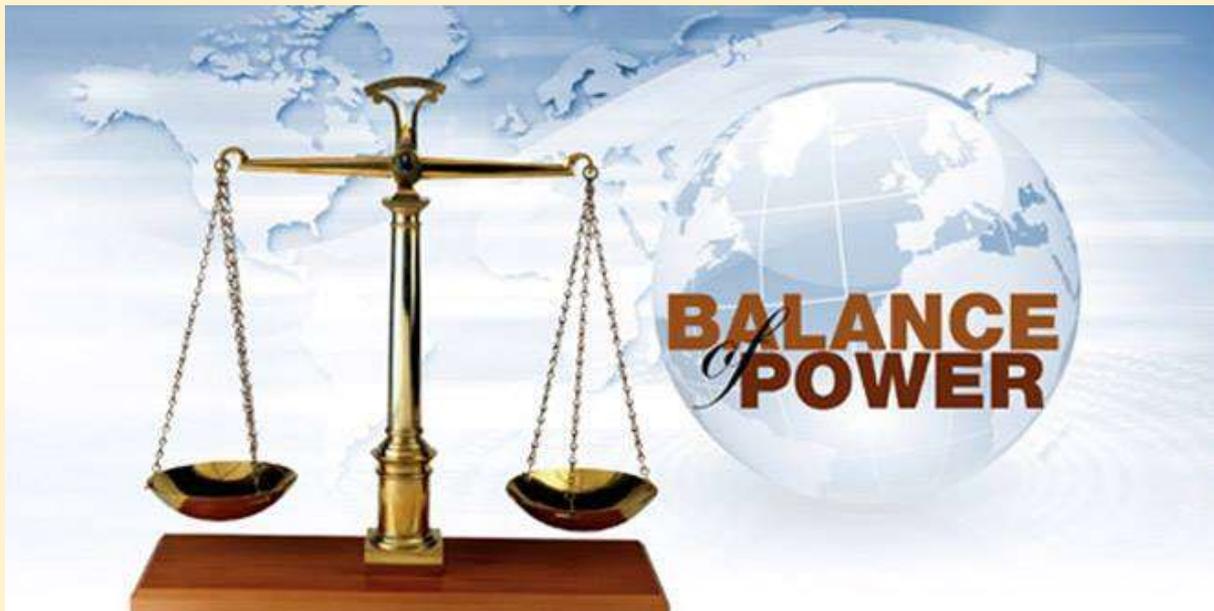


Balance of Power



By

Dr. Subhas Singha Roy

Balance of power is a type of equilibrium. It refers to a relatively peaceful and stable international system. States behave in such a manner that a stability in international arena prevails. International politics is regarded as Hobbesian state of nature where anarchy prevails; no central authority controls the affairs. In that situation, peace is more desirable and war to be thwarted. To achieve this objective (peaceful state of affairs), balance of power assumed significance. Balance of power is a world system remained in international politics since the 17th century to first decades of 20th century. More specifically we can say following Joseph Frankel 1648 to 1914. Near about 300 years of stability prevailed in world politics. Frankel holds that balance was maintained by the few powerful states. It was a balance of power among the great powers and the system depended on their coexistence (Frankel, 1964-P-153).¹ Prof. George Schwarzenberger defines balance of power as relatively peaceful and stable international system. Castleigh defines balance of power as the maintenance of such a just equilibrium where no state would be in a position to impose or control the behavior of others.

Features of balance of power

There are several features of balance of power.

- 1) Balance of may be simple or complex. When two states possessing near equal military powers, there will least chance of war which in other way a balance of power because states will obviously hold that waging war will incur loss of resources and human lives and no fruitful gain is possible. But the situation becomes complex when numerous states are involved in this process. There is every chance of being attacked. Vital interests of the states (security, territorial integrity, sovereignty etc) will be in peril, then states will be eager to maintain status quo or stability. For that matter forming alliance to curb the power of threatening state. Alliance and counter alliance appear to be the mechanism among host of others. So balance of power is fluid; not permanent. Statesmen will craft their foreign policy after careful calculation of their strength and weakness vis-à-vis the other states.
- 2) Prof. Aneek Chatterjee² believes that balance of power can not be regarded as an instrument for preserving world peace. It aims at maintaining the sovereignty of national-states, it does not necessarily maintain world peace. Rather peace is the byproduct of balance of power; not the primary objective.
- 3) Other states are viewed as potential ally rather than enemy because to curtail power of the threatening state, cooperation of other states assumes significance.

Methods of balance of power

Several methods are applied to maintain the balance of power among the states especially the big and powerful states. Prof Aneek Chatterjee³ holds that balance can be achieved either by curtailing the power or enhancing the power. Prof, Morgenthau believes that there are **four methods** for balance of power namely-a) Divide and rule, b) Compensations, c) Alliance, and d) Armaments

Divide and rule

It is a traditional method to weaken the strong state either territorially or ideologically. Policy is aimed at thwarting the powerful state. Germany was divided to prevent her becoming a powerful state. Similarly, Morgenthau cites the attempt of erstwhile USSR to divide Europe

¹ Joseph Frankel " International Relations in a Changing World", Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1964.

² Aneek Chaterjee "International Relations Today" Pearson, New Delhi, 2010

³ Ibid p-65

ideologically (like West and East. West represents the capitalist system and east as the socialist system at that time) as example.

Compensation

Compensation implies the division of territory or annexation. 18th to 20th century this method was frequently applied to avoid war and maintain balance in power. Several treaties were crafted to achieve the objective. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) can be cited as an example which succeeded to terminate the War of Spanish Succession by way of territorial compensation.

Armaments

Procuring arms and maximize military power is another method of maintaining balance of power. Armaments provided for a balance of power in a negative way. It is a method to outsmart other powerful states militarily.

Alliances

Alliance and counter-alliance are the accepted method for balance of power. History littered with numerous examples of forming alliance to prevent the rise of powerful state. Most alliances are formed under a perceived threat.

In addition to these methods, buffer state is also regarded as another method of balance of power. Buffer state is a small intermediary state being used by the great powers to balancing the game of power politics. Buffer state plays important role for balance.